

The Best Defense Is a Good Offense

Keep the Focus on Knowledge Generation and Communication



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Helping students become information seekers, synthesizers, analyzers, evaluators, innovative thinkers, problem solvers, decision makers, producers of knowledge, communicators, and collaborators is one way to create an environment that minimizes cheating, plagiarism, and copyright violations. In such an environment, you may also be able to take advantage of the tools digital natives regularly use, such as instant messaging, chat, and cell phones. As much as possible, eliminate testing of basic facts and skills and focus on helping students find and use the right tool or information source for the task at hand. You may not be able to eliminate high stakes testing, but if the school environment is focused on teaching for understanding, students should do well on any kind of test.

Projects, assignments, and lessons that get students asking questions and using the information they find to create something new, teach a concept

to someone else, solve a problem, or contribute to a solution help prepare students for their futures. In such an environment, many unethical behaviors simply don't work. If the emphasis is on what you do with basic facts, then it doesn't matter if Jane asked her neighbor or used her cell phone to find out the information she needed.

Technology helps differentiate the delivery of information. If students are poor readers or not native language speakers, set them up for the text to read to them. If students can't remember their math facts, teach them to use spreadsheets to generate their own reference tables and give them a calculator, but include lots of estimating activities. Develop creative assignments with real-world connections for students to demonstrate their understanding.

Technology enables students to create their own music and art. There is a lot of wonderful music software. Is it available to your students? Do

you have and use digital and video cameras as well as graphics tablets and drawing software? If students have access to tools that allow them to be creative, they are less likely to need copyrighted materials.

Technology does provide access to writing, art, music, and video that may be copyrighted. Moreover, this access is important for learning. As technology has made access and copying easier, the notion of copyright as well as attribution is increasingly important and is the responsibility of all educators. We hope this issue will clarify the fair use laws, alert you to gray-area situations that really aren't gray, and start productive conversations in your educational setting. In the inquiry-focused, knowledge-generating school environment, appropriate use should not be an uphill battle, but should be easy to emphasize and maintain.

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